

V2 and polarity – two sides of the same coin?

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The Germanic languages, with the notable exception of English, are characterized by the distinct syntactic property of verb second (V2): in declarative main clauses, the finite verb must be the second constituent of the clause. Within the generative framework, verb second (or V-to-C-movement) has generally been assumed to have no deeper syntactic implication besides word order; Chomsky (1999) goes so far as saying that it might be a trivial phonological property of some languages. Work on verb second in German has questioned this view, however, and it has been proposed that verb second might have semantic underpinnings (see e.g. Wechsler 1991, Truckenbrodt 2006 and Meinunger 2006).

In this talk I will put forward the novel observation that verb second and polarity item licensing are mutually exclusive in Swedish. Only environments that do not display V2-properties allow licensing of polarity items (without overt licensers), and vice versa: environments licensing polarity items do not conform to verb second. The discussion is based on the distribution of embedded V2 clauses in Swedish, although I show that my observation can be extended to account for other clause types as well.

I will argue that the observed distributional pattern offers a new insight to both verb second and polarity item licensing. My proposal is inspired by two works on PI-licensing: Giannakidou's (1998) notion of *veridicality* and Horn's (2002) notion of *assertoric inertia*. Polarity items are licensed in (non)veridical, assertorically inert contexts in Swedish, while verb second only occurs in veridical, asserted contexts. Based on these notions, I propose that the distribution of V2 and PIs respectively is sensitive to *truth-value evaluation*. Propositions whose truth-value is at stake in the present discourse license V2, whereas propositions whose truth-value cannot be questioned in the present discourse are transparent to PI-licensing (e.g. presupposed complements and conditionals). The mutual exclusiveness of V2 and PIs in Swedish can thus be explained by relating the phenomena to one semantic notion. As a consequence of this proposal, I argue that the prevailing view of V2 as being motivated by word order considerations must be questioned.

References

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